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By: Kalei Rupp

**Alaska National Guard tests capabilities in radiological-hazard exercise**

**CAMP DENALI, Alaska** – The Alaska National Guard's 103<sup>rd</sup> Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) tested its ability to respond to a chemical, biological and radiological threat in Sitka March 25-27 alongside other numerous agencies.

The exercise, dubbed Exercise Orca, revolved around the scenario of eco-terrorists, known to have chemists within their group, who threatened commercial fish and aqua-culture industries in Southeast Alaska. The terrorists set up a clandestine lab in the old Fort Rousseau on Makhnati Island in Sitka where they were notionally manufacturing unlicensed radioactive materials and spreading it through food at a local bazaar causing possible radiation poisoning.

"Our primary purpose for this exercise was to test our ability to respond to a remote location in Alaska, understand the town's capabilities, interact with a small town's command post and assess our interoperability among several agencies," said Lt. Col. Stephen Wilson, 103<sup>rd</sup> CST (WMD) commander. "We also tested the Civil Support Team's response, as well as the community's response, to a chemical, biological and radiological hazard."

During the exercise, the City of Sitka received several notional chemical, biological and radiological threats, which prompted officials to request assistance from the 103<sup>rd</sup> CST (WMD).

"We determined that additional support was required in radiation assistance, so the Department of Energy's Radiation Assistance Program Region 8 arrived to advise on radiation hazards," Wilson said.

In addition, several agencies also provided field experts and assistance, testing their own capabilities as well. Among those that participated: Alaska Division of Public Health's Public Health Nursing, Alaska State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Sitka Fire Department, Sitka Mountain Rescue, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Sitka Police Department, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, U.S. Coast Guard, Civil Support Teams from Hawaii, Guam, and Rhode Island, as well as U.S. Army Pacific and the Alaska National Guard's 1-207<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment.

"This is the first time we had an exercise of this magnitude involving weapons of mass destruction," said Al Stevens, Sitka Fire Department, operations section chief during the exercise. "We're a small Southeast community that doesn't have near the capabilities to respond to a large incident like this, so it's good to train with the military and other agencies that we would call upon in this type of situation."

Not only was each agency able to refine its role during a hazardous materials response, but the agencies were able to hone their proficiencies when working together.

"The exercise went very well; the Civil Support Teams and several of the agencies learned a lot about each other's capabilities," Wilson said. "We now have a better understanding of how to integrate in a small command post setting. The City of Sitka also has a better understanding of haz-mat response resources in the state, specifically, officials now understand our 103<sup>rd</sup> CST (WMD) capabilities better."

"Prior to this exercise, we had no idea what the CST did or who they were really," Stevens said. "But now, we all walked away from this exercise feeling very confident that if we ever encountered an incident involving weapons of mass destruction, we would certainly call the CST and they would be able to assist and provide resources and results that we wouldn't have alone."

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Cutlines:

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Tech. Sgt. Nina Kolyvanova (right), Alaska National Guard 103<sup>rd</sup> Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction), and Sgt. 1st Class Matt Ayuyu, Guam National Guard 94<sup>th</sup> CST, process two members of the 94<sup>th</sup> CST through a decontamination line during Exercise Orca in Sitka March 27. Multiple agencies participated in the exercise to test their ability to respond to a chemical, biological and radiological event. Photo: Roberta White, Sitka Fire Department

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Staff Sgt. Holt Duffin and Maj. Michael Jones, both with the Alaska National Guard 103<sup>rd</sup> Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) arrive on scene of a notional suspected drug manufacturing lab in Sitka during Exercise Orca March 26. "Our primary purpose for this exercise was to test our ability to respond to a remote location in Alaska, understand the town's capabilities, interact with a small town's command post and assess our interoperability among several agencies," said Lt. Col. Stephen Wilson, 103<sup>rd</sup> CST (WMD) commander. Photo: Roberta White, Sitka Fire Department

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Tech. Sgt. Nina Kolyvanova, Alaska National Guard 103<sup>rd</sup> Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction), explains decontamination procedures to first responders in Sitka March 26 during Exercise Orca. The 103<sup>rd</sup> CST (WMD) joined forces with multiple agencies to test their ability to respond to a chemical, biological and radiological event. Photo: Roberta White, Sitka Fire Department